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Hines, Walker Downer

Some obstacles to
rehabilitation of Europe

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SOME OBSTACLES TO REHABILITATION
OF EUROPE

DIFFICULTIES INHERENT IN THE POLITICAL
MACHINERY OF CONTINENTAL GOVERNMENTS.

Address by

WALKER D. HINES

At Dinner Conference of Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.

New York, December 19, 1922.

A.W.L. July 29, 23,

ADDRESS BY WALKER D. HINES TO COUNCIL ON
FOREIGN RELATIONS, DECEMBER 19, 1922.

Physical devastation in Europe stopped, broadly speaking, with the Armistice. But at that time the economic, financial and political devastations growing out of the War just began to appear, and to a large extent have grown steadily worse ever since, and, in my opinion, have caused and will cause more misery than was involved in the direct physical consequences of the War.

For four years the catastrophe to the economic, financial and political relationships in the world has unfolded and spread before us and nevertheless rehabilitation is not accomplished. Some times it seems as if it had not begun. Speaking broadly, reparation claims have been neither paid nor adjusted, the financial structure has not been remade, and little has been accomplished towards general disarmament. Rehabilitation remains the most stupendous and baffling task that has ever confronted the world.

The dark picture which faces us needs light from many angles. For one thing, I believe it will be enlightening to consider the sort of machinery which the continent of Europe has had to employ in remedying the evils which beset the world. We know the job is a big one and that it has not been performed. It is worth while to consider the tools with which it must be done.

These tools are to a large extent the political machinery which constitutes the governments of Europe. Practically every step in the reformation so badly needed requires government action or government sanction and that can only find expression and accomplishment through utilizing existing political machinery. There must be in each country a ministry with capacity and courage to propose each necessary governmental step, and there must be a legislative assembly to support the ministry in this action. In other words, practically every move in the stupendous task

brings us face to face with practical politics which constitute and operate governmental machinery.

I believe it is fair to say that everywhere on the continent of Europe the existing scheme of constitutional government is poorly adapted to dealing promptly with such unprecedented governmental problems. In practically every country there is a large number of separate political groups and the life of any particular government or ministry depends on some temporary combination of enough of these groups to secure for the time being a majority in the legislative assembly. These combinations are constantly changing, are largely actuated by personal competition of their leaders or groups of leaders, and my observation leads me to believe that personal animosities play a far larger part than they do in our political life.

These groups can and will easily combine to pull down a leader who rises above the level of the other leaders. These combinations can and do overthrow ministries and hamper continuity of policies, but it is exceedingly difficult for them to adhere continuously to the chief of any one group so as to give him the support and confidence necessary to carry out affirmative policies.

Such a form of government is taxed to its capacity in dealing with ordinary governmental problems in normal times and is a machine which is not likely to function successfully in handling the unparalleled perplexities which now vex the world.

What I have said is, I believe, true as to the oldest and most experienced of the continental schemes of constitutional government. But many of these governments do not have even the advantage of experience. Germany is struggling to learn how to be a republic. It has a tremendously able and selfish capitalistic class which has frequently been charged with continuing to be strongly sympathetic with the principles of Kaiserism. Below the ranks of cabinet officers the government is carried on largely by the same civil service which was in office prior to the War and it would be surprising if it had changed so as to have a thorough sympathy with the new constitutional principles. Then we have the new and inexperienced democracy trying to find expression

through new governmental forms. When we add these and other special weaknesses to the defects of government by party groups, we do not get a good machine for handling even normal governmental problems.

If, for further illustrations, we look at Czecho-Slovakia, Poland and Jugo-Slavia, we find they are all earnestly trying to learn how to use new and unfamiliar governmental tools and each is trying at the same time to harmonize sectional and racial animosities within its own borders and each is finding varying degrees of inexperience in its public men and in its electorate, and I believe all are largely dependent on changing combinations of various political groups.

But the difficulty with the tools of government is enormously increased on account of the difficulty of the tasks they have to perform at the present time. These tools could not be expected to function with extraordinary success even on governmental problems of fair average difficulty, and yet now they are called on to solve the greatest problems that mankind has ever had to face.

Every country in Europe is in distress, is troubled with internal conflicting interests, appears to have external interests widely divergent from its neighbors, the spirit of nationalism has been inflamed anew, and the peoples are filled with disillusionment, bitterness and distrust.

On every hand we see these countries involved in hopeless contradictions. To a larger extent they are economically dependent on each other and can never hope for tranquil development except by promoting commercial intercourse across their boundaries, and yet in obvious contradiction of their own interests they create barriers to intercourse by establishing protective duties and restrictive licenses. France wants Germany to pay reparations. It is obvious that Germany can pay on a large scale only in goods and services, and yet there has been the greatest hesitation in permitting German goods and labor to be employed in reconstructing the devastated regions, and this because of the competition with home industry. The allies want Germany to economize and yet they are not willing to let Germany promote economy by restricting the importation of foreign luxuries because this might hamper the market of those who make and sell those

luxuries. Everybody sighs for relief from the burden of armament and yet, because of the general distrust and insecurity, great armies are maintained throughout the continent except so far as they have been eliminated in Germany and the other ex-enemy countries.

In such times and with the political tools which I have attempted to describe Europe is called on to remake the world, through the adoption of expedients which are novel, untried and uncertain.

The government of each country in arriving at the readjustments necessary to accomplish this almost hopeless task, must do so by making concessions and these concessions will always be attacked by a large part of the political groups as constituting steps contrary to the obvious and immediate national interest. Clearly in such conditions no country can move faster than support can be developed for an enlightened policy of mutual concession and no political leader is likely to retire from extreme positions which political exigencies have forced upon him except so far as methods of graceful retirement can be found.

One outstanding conclusion to be drawn from these conditions of such indescribable difficulty is that Europe in order to extricate itself from its difficulties needs every ounce of help to be found in the world.

I would like for a few moments to refer particularly to France for an illustration of the difficult functioning of political machinery at the present time. I wish to mention a few of the difficulties.

France has had a paramount need for prompt payment by Germany of an ample indemnity. England has appeared to have a greater need for a prosperous Germany with which to trade. Obviously it has been easy for political groups in France to attack the government at any time on any concession on the indemnity not only because it was a waiver of something which France claimed and needed, but because it appeared to be playing into the hands of England.

The French firmly believe that England got by far the best of the peace settlement. They say their interest was primarily in reparations and security and they got neither while England's

interest in security was obtained at the outset of the Peace by the surrender of the German navy and England's principal interest, that of commerce, was secured through taking away Germany's merchant marine and the German colonies. Whenever England now suggests that France make a concession to Germany the French public man is likely to charge that that is simply to help Germany so it can make a better market for English commerce.

In France Germany's treaty obligation to pay reparation is regarded as a solemn debt. France is asked to waive a large part of it. It is easy to see that a French political leader lays himself open to attack if he proposes to waive in large part the war debt which is due to France without getting any waiver in return of the war debt due by France to England and the United States.

But while France earnestly insists on reparation, my belief is that it thinks still more earnestly of security. The French public men behold England safe from Germany because the sea is between them and because the German navy has been destroyed and they behold France next door to Germany, with its population nearly double that of France, they see France denied any guaranty by England and the United States against unprovoked German aggression, and they see it criticized for maintaining an army which it regards as necessary to defend itself when nobody else is willing to defend it.

This fear for French security may be regarded by us as exaggerated, but I believe it is after all the greatest motive which is in the minds of the French people, and unless and until security in some form shall be assured, I believe it will be a deterrent to any adequate adjustment of the reparations problem.

I believe many French public men are continually haunted by this dilemma, that France cannot be paid reparations without making Germany strong and that Germany cannot be made strong without endangering the security of France. Undoubtedly one of the gravest immediate problems in the world is the restoration of economic and financial stability in Germany. But I cannot rid myself of the belief that so long as France is not given adequate assurance as to her security against German aggression we will see an influential sentiment in France to the effect that it is better to let Germany collapse than to put it on the road to

prosperity while leaving France without protection; or to put it another way, that it is better for France to take measures which will help to assure her security even though those measures may contribute still further to the weakening of Germany.

I state these fears and motives in France because I believe they constitute factors of the very greatest importance in shaping the governmental action of that country. I do not mean to say that I think the fears are well founded or the motives are those best calculated to promote the interests of France. But they are great and controlling facts in the situation and up to the present time have afforded an ample basis for successful political resistance to steps necessary to plans for rehabilitation.

Nor do I think we can give ourselves airs of superiority when we consider the functioning of French politics in these matters. These things seem at least as vital to the French as a policy of isolation may seem to our public men. For my part I cannot see how they can fairly criticize France for adhering to a nationalistic, and no doubt selfish and short-sighted, policy in the face of these pressing and vital questions when we, in our four-year policy of isolation, have ourselves manifested to a very considerable extent a policy of nationalistic isolation which may fairly be characterized as selfish and short-sighted.

It has seemed to me worth while to attempt this hurried analysis of these weaknesses which characterize the political machinery of Europe because I believe this is an important part of the background for the study of substantive reforms. An appreciation of the very human character of these difficulties and of the fact that the reactions to them have been the normal reactions of perfectly human public men such as we have in our own country ought to make us more understanding and more sympathetic in our appraisal of the situation.

But I think another reason for dwelling on the essential political difficulties of the situation is that it serves to emphasize that Europe needs all the help the world can muster and that our own country ought not to continue its policy of isolation. Our influence is perhaps the only influence in the world that can break through the political labyrinth in which Europe has been wandering for the past four years.

Further than that, an analysis of the handicaps of the present political machinery will show that in the face of this world crisis we cannot expect a solution simply by following normally selfish and normally short-sighted political reactions. It is a time for a spiritual quality to dominate practical politics. When war comes it has a startling suddenness which brings out a spiritual quality that subordinates ordinary political processes. The present troubles of the world have crept on it for four years and are lacking in that dramatic precision and intensity without which it is difficult for governments to lift themselves out of their customary political formulas. Yet the dangers of the world and the prospects of human misery are as real and as certain as in war itself. It is a time for a spirit for Peace as unselfish, fearless and above mere political phrases as was our spirit for War.

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